



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

April 6, 2000
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW, Room TW-A325
Washington, DC 20554

RECEIVED
APR 10 2000
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Health Resources and
Services Administration
Rockville MD 20857

DOCKET FILE COPY ORIGINAL

Re: Universal Service (CC Docket Nos. 96-45) "Rural Health Care for Insular Areas"

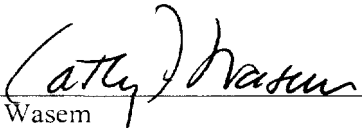
Dear Secretary,

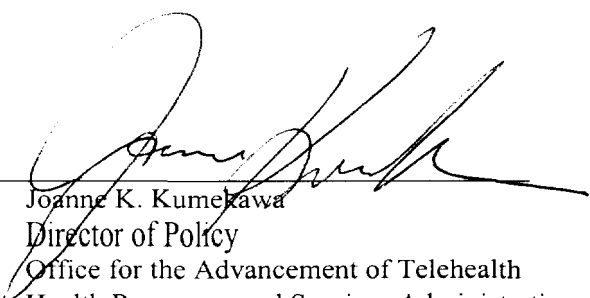
The purpose of this letter is to provide a public record of an ex-parte correspondence between the Office for the Advancement of Telehealth, (OAT), Health Resources and Services Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Praveen Goyal, Attorney Advisor, Common Carrier Bureau, Federal Communications Commission (FCC). On March 23, 2000, OAT sent Mr. Goyal a copy of a February 19, 2000 Resolution by the Pacific Island Health Officers Association (PIHOA) on the Applicability of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 to the Pacific Island Region. PIHOA is comprised of the Chief Health Officials of the Pacific Island Region, such as the Health Ministers or Secretaries of the Department of Health for the Pacific Island Region governments.

PIHOA's resolution strongly urges the FCC to include not only the U.S. Territories of American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) but also the Freely Associated States of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Yap" in the definition of "insular areas."

In addition, it strongly urges the FCC to redefine the urban area in the Pacific Island Region to be Honolulu, Hawaii for the purposes of implementing the universal service provisions. The resolution highlights the poverty, remote rural communities and great need for access to basic health care in the Region. It also underscores the region's high telecommunication transmission costs, which make telemedicine and telehealth a costly solution.

It also notes that although Guam, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands already contribute to the Universal Service Fund, they do not benefit from the Rural Health Care Program despite their status as some of the neediest jurisdictions in the United States.


Cathy Wasem
Director of Telemedicine
Office for the Advancement of Telehealth
Health Resources and Services Administration
Department of Health and Human Services


Joanne K. Kumekawa
Director of Policy
Office for the Advancement of Telehealth
Health Resources and Services Administration
Department of Health and Human Services

No. of Copies rec'd 0+5
List ABCDE

CC: Ellen Blackler, Special Assistant, CCB
Linda Armstrong, Assistant Chief, Accounting, CCB
Lisa Boehlery, Team Leader, Accounting, CCB
Praveen Goyal, Attorney Advisor, Accounting, CCB
Mark Nadel, Attorney Advisor, Accounting, CCB

Attachments

Resolution of the Pacific Island Health Officers Association, Regarding the Applicability of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 to the Pacific Island Region, February 19, 2000.

**Resolution
of the
Pacific Island Health Officers Association**

**Regarding the Applicability of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 to the Pacific
Island Region**

February 19, 2000

WHEREAS, the Pacific Island Health Officers Association representing the United States Territories of American Samoa and Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Freely Associated States of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau strongly urge the United States Congress, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Rural Health Care Division to include the United States Territories and the Freely Associated States in the definition of insular areas and to define the urban area in the Pacific Island region to be Honolulu, Hawaii, for the purposes of applying universal service discounts; and,

WHEREAS, an important purpose of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 is to ensure the quality, accessibility and cost-effectiveness of health care in rural and remote communities throughout the United States as the telecommunications industry is deregulated; and,

WHEREAS, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 calls for providing financial support to rural Health Care Providers (HCPs) to off-set the high cost of telecommunications in rural and remote areas; and,

WHEREAS, a fundamental purpose of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 is to ensure that HCPs in rural and remote communities pay no more than HCPs in urban areas for telecommunications interconnectivity; and,

WHEREAS, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Rural Health Care Division (RHCD) defined the urban area for the Pacific Island territories of American Samoa and Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to be their capital cities; and,

WHEREAS, the capitals of these areas are in rural communities defined by the U.S. Census and Departments of Agriculture and have great needs that are in need of universal service support; and,

WHEREAS, the HCPs in the Pacific Island jurisdictions are in great need of using telehealth and telemedicine to improve the quality, accessibility and cost-effectiveness of health and medical care; and,

WHEREAS, the Pacific Island jurisdictions have medical technologies but are unable to fully use such systems to its full capabilities due to the high costs of telecommunications based on their remoteness from metropolitan centers; and,

WHEREAS, because of the current definition of the metropolitan center, the rural HCPs in the Pacific Island jurisdictions are unable to apply for the discounts to the Rural Health Care Division to connect to Honolulu, Hawaii, the nearest metropolitan community in the Pacific Island region; and,

WHEREAS, it is important to the HCPs in the region to have reasonably priced telecommunications connectivity to transmit medical imagery, consult with specialists, obtain continuing medical education, and share in the other resources in Honolulu; and,

WHEREAS, the Pacific Island jurisdictions are unable to participate in broadcast satellite programs due to the location of the satellite over the continental United States; and,

WHEREAS, the telecommunication carriers in these jurisdictions have been assessing a universal service fee; and,

WHEREAS, no Health Care Provider in American Samoa, Guam, and/or the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands are obtaining any of the benefits of the monies paid into universal service funds; and,

WHEREAS, the definition and its implications are not fair to the rural communities in the Pacific.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE PACIFIC ISLANDS HEALTH OFFICERS ASSOCIATION THAT:

The President and Members of PIHOA strongly urge the Federal Communications Commission to include in the definition of insular areas the United States Territories of American Samoa, Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the Freely Associated States of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT:

The President and Members of PIHOA strongly urge the Federal Communications Commission to redefine the urban area in the Pacific Island Region to be Honolulu, Hawaii for the purposes of implementing the universal service provisions relating to the rural health care.


BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT:

Copies of this Resolution be transmitted to the President and Vice President of the United States (U.S.), the President of the U.S. Senate, the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, the members of the American Samoa, Guam, and Hawaii Congressional delegation, and the representative of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT:

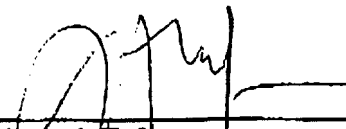
Copies of this Resolution be transmitted to the Governors of the of the Territories of American Samoa and Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Presidents of the Freely Associated States of the Federated States of Micronesia, including the Governors of the States of Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Kosrae, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau, the Association of Pacific Island Legislatures, and that a comprehensive letter be presented by the Executive Director of the PIHOA so that policymakers can understand the significance of the problem and its impacts on the Pacific Island Region.

INTRODUCED BY:

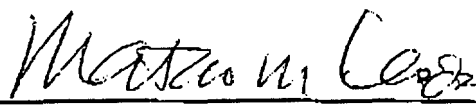


Joseph K.P. Villagomez
President, PIHOA and
Secretary of Health
Commonwealth of the Northern
Mariana Islands

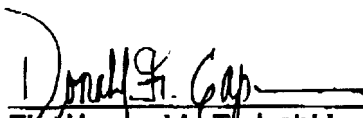
PIHOA Directors:




Joseph Tufa
Director of Health
Department of Health Services
American Samoa Government

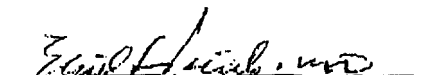



Masao Ueda
Minister of Health
Republic of Palau


for 

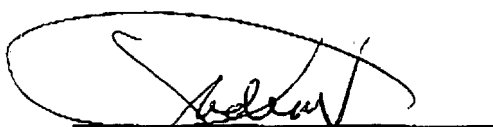
The Honorable Tadashi Lometo
Minister of Health and Environment
Republic of the Marshall Islands



Dennis G. Rodriguez
Director of Health
Department of Health and
Social Services
Guam


Eliuel K. Pretrick
Secretary, Department of Health,
Education & Social Affairs
FSM National Government


Hiroshi H. Ismael
Director of Health Services
Department of Health Services
Kosrae State, FSM


Herliep Nowell
Director of Health Services
Department of Health Services
Chuuk State, FSM


Victor A. Ngaden
Director of Health Services
Department of Health Services
Yap State, FSM


Mary Nou Hawley
Acting Director of Health Services
Department of Health Services
Pohnpei State, FSM